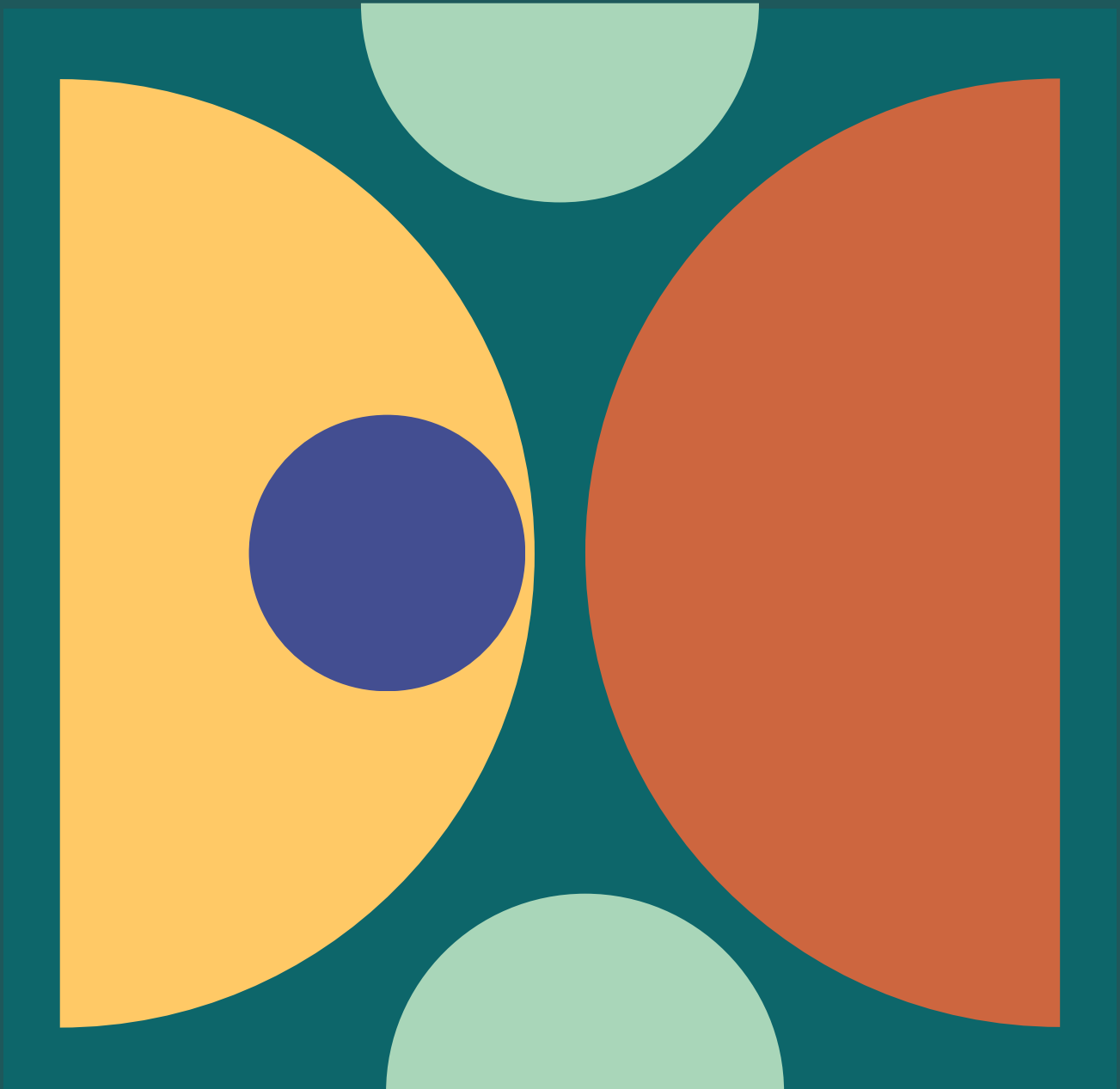




# *Building Inclusive Workplaces*

**A Practical Guide to Menstrual Health at Work**



# ABOUT

## *The Udaiti Foundation*

The Udaiti Foundation is committed to driving India's vision of a Viksit Bharat and a \$30 trillion economy through two key objectives of increasing India's Female Labour Force Participation Rate to 50% and doubling the number of women-owned enterprises in the country. As a force multiplier in the Women's Economic Empowerment ecosystem, we actively provide data-backed evidence to the private sector organizations, state governments, and the start-up ecosystem and collaborate with them to drive change on the ground.

## *Close the Gender Gap Initiative*

The private sector holds significant potential to enhance women's participation in the workforce. Close the Gender Gap is an ambitious initiative to increase women's workforce participation in large enterprises in India from the current 18%.

Since the adoption of the Business Responsibility and Sustainability (BRSR) framework, there have been promising efforts to fill the gap in gender-disaggregated company-wise data. For instance, the reporting of gender data by NSE-listed companies has increased from 52% in FY 2022-23 to 57% in FY 2023-24. To this end, the Udaiti Foundation has launched the CGG Data Hub under the ambit of the CGG Initiative, a data-to-solutions platform for data, insights, tools, and resources on gender representation and policies in the formal sector. As a browsable web resource, the platform allows users to interact with the data and generate sector-wise, year-wise, and comparative reports through the Women's Formal Employment Tracker. CGG aims to catalyze commitments and action for gender parity at work.

To access the CGG Data Hub and learn more about it, please click [here](#).

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# INTRODUCTION

Menstrual Health and Hygiene (MHH) encompasses the ability of women, girls, and all individuals who menstruate to manage their menstrual cycles with dignity, safety, and access to necessary resources. This includes access to accurate information, affordable menstrual products, quality healthcare, a stigma-free environment, and the freedom to participate fully in all aspects of life without menstrual-related limitations.

In light of the introduction of [The Right of Women to Menstrual Leave and Free Access to Menstrual Health Products Bill, 2022](#), creating a workplace that supports menstrual health and hygiene (MHH) goes beyond fulfilling a social obligation—it is a business necessity. A supportive approach improves employee well-being, reduces absenteeism, and cultivates a more inclusive and productive workforce.

This guide is designed to help private sector organizations create and implement an inclusive and effective menstrual leave policy. It emphasizes the importance of adopting a systems approach, addresses potential challenges, and offers practical steps for drafting and executing policies aligned with MHH principles. By prioritizing MHH, organizations can advance workplace equity and build a supportive environment for all employees.

# IMPORTANCE OF A FAIR MENSTRUAL POLICY

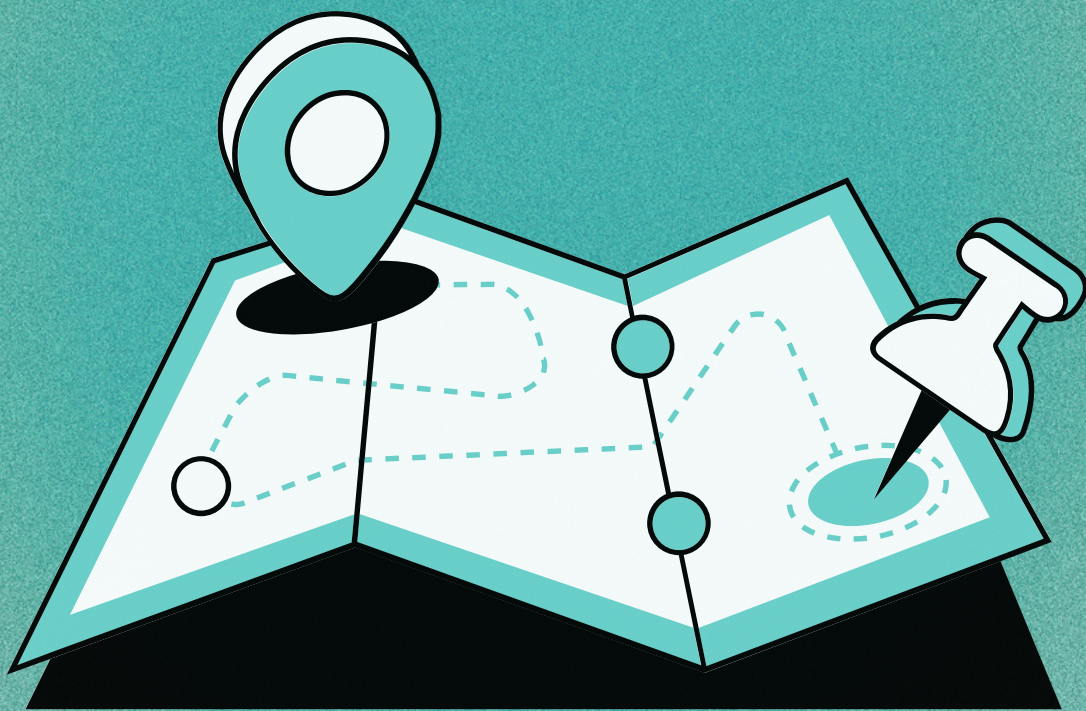
Studies highlight the significant impact of menstruation-related symptoms on women's productivity and well-being. A 2021 [study](#) by Radboud University Medical Centre found that one in three women experienced such intense period pain that they were unable to perform daily tasks, with many concealing their symptoms. Similarly, a 2016 YouGov [study](#) for the BBC revealed that 52% of women experienced severe pain affecting their work, but only 27% informed their employers of the true cause. These symptoms contribute more to lost productivity through presenteeism (employees attending work despite being unwell) than absenteeism, highlighting the need for workplace policies that offer better support. Addressing these issues could help alleviate the career and health challenges faced by women, promoting a more inclusive and supportive work environment.

A comprehensive menstrual leave policy should be inclusive of all menstruators, including non-binary and transgender individuals, and address key implementation challenges. To ensure transparency and acceptance, the policy could include a ceiling on the number of leaves, a remuneration structure, and the option to provide medical certification for additional leave.

Complementary measures like work-from-home options, flexible schedules, and improved workplace infrastructure, including menstrual essentials and rest spaces can reduce the need for leave. We discuss the challenges such a policy can raise with potential solutions for developing a fair menstrual policy that drives inclusivity and productivity in the workplace.



# ROADMAP TO IMPLEMENTATION





# BUILDING AN MHH-FRIENDLY WORKSPACE

While an organization charts out the course of action to build and implement a menstrual policy that works for them, certain [provisions](#) can be ensured to ease employee well-being before even drafting an MHH policy:

Category	Best Practices
<b>Infrastructure for Menstrual Health</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ensure separate sanitation, and hygiene facilities for women and men.</li><li>• Keep facilities clean at all times.</li><li>• Provide disposal options for clothes and pads.</li><li>• Install locks, lights, and water in toilet facilities.</li><li>• Offer emergency sanitary pad supplies.</li><li>• Employ a trained health professional in larger workplaces for assistance with pain relief or sanitary products.</li></ul>
<b>Workplace Policies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Include menstrual hygiene in staff policies, allowing extra sick days for employees.</li><li>• Organize awareness sessions on menstrual hygiene for female staff, led by a health professional.</li></ul>
<b>Supportive Practices for Female Employees</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bring menstrual emergency supplies to work.</li><li>• Support colleagues needing bathroom breaks or managing PMS.</li><li>• Discreetly inform someone about clothing stains and offer assistance.</li></ul>
<b>Supportive Practices for Male Employees</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Support female colleagues who may require more bathroom breaks, experience PMS, or take sick days due to menstrual cycles.</li><li>• Politely and discreetly inform a woman or girl if she stains her clothes or ask another woman to do so.</li></ul>
<b>Flexible Work Arrangements</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Flexible work arrangements empower women by aligning work with their cycles, reducing the need for menstrual leave, boosting productivity, and enhancing well-being.</li></ul>



# DRAFTING A MENSTRUAL LEAVE POLICY

## *Definition and Scope*

Menstrual Leave refers to paid time off granted to employees experiencing menstruation to manage health-related challenges such as severe menstrual pain, heavy bleeding, or other associated symptoms that significantly impact their ability to perform their job duties.

## *Leave Entitlement*

Companies may consider the following options for menstrual leave entitlement:

- **Option 1:** 1 day of paid menstrual leave per month, with an annual cap of 10 days (to adjust for the probability that periods might happen on a weekend).
- **Option 2:** 2 days of paid menstrual leave per month with an annual cap of 10 days.
- **Option 3:** Flexible leave allocation within an annual limit (e.g., up to 12 days per year), allowing employees to choose the number of leave days that best suits their individual needs.

Considerations: The leaves should be capped at 2 leaves per month. The chosen option will be determined based on factors such as company size, budget, and industry best practices.

## Leave Provision

To ensure a respectful and inclusive workplace, companies can consider these options for menstrual leave:

Leave Type	Number of Leaves Annually	Best Practice
<b>Option 1: Integrate Menstrual Leave into Existing Sick Leave</b>	The number of sick leaves for employees may be increased periodically to include additional menstruation leave based on needs analysis.	Incorporating menstrual leave into sick leave policies reduces stigma and promotes fairness by treating it equally with other leave types. This approach challenges societal taboos, fosters a progressive example, and creates a supportive, inclusive environment that values diversity, gender equality, and employee health.
<b>Option 2: Establish 'Menstrual Leave' as a Separate Leave Category</b>	10 leaves per year, with possible monthly usage limits, accounting for weekend menstrual cycles.	This option ensures transparency and enables targeted menstrual health support and awareness programs.
<b>Option 3: Integrate Menstrual Leave into a Broader 'Wellness Leave' Category</b>	All employees can avail a decided number of wellness leaves, over and above sick leaves. Menstruators can avail a higher number.	<u>Wellness Leave</u> is gender-neutral, acknowledging that all employees may require time off when sick leave isn't available. It accommodates various needs, such as menstrual discomfort, stress-related symptoms, and privacy for medical procedures.

*In 2020, Zomato implemented a menstrual leave policy granting 10 days of paid leave annually for corporate employees to foster a culture of trust, truth, and acceptance. Most women have ~14 menstrual cycles in a year. Adjusting for the probability of having your period on a weekend, 10 extra leaves are granted.*

## Eligibility

- **Eligibility Criteria:** This policy applies to all employees experiencing menstruation, regardless of gender identity or expression.
- **Coverage:** Coverage includes full-time, part-time, contractual employees, and workers.
- **Leave Adjustment:** For part-time and contractual employees, menstrual leave is integrated into their existing work schedule instead of being an additional day off.
- **Example:** Similar to Zomato's model, employees can choose which day to take off during the week, ensuring fair and consistent application of leave.
- **Non-Discrimination:** Eligibility criteria will not discriminate based on gender identity, gender expression, or any other protected characteristic.

## ZOMATO'S MENSTRUAL LEAVE POLICY FOR FEMALE DELIVERY PARTNERS ON THE MOVE

In 2021, Zomato launched a menstrual leave policy for women delivery partners, offering two days of paid leave each month to address menstrual discomfort. Initially requiring active partners to report their leave, the process was simplified to automatically credit earnings for two days monthly, regardless of leave taken, supporting flexibility in the gig economy.

Zomato provides comprehensive support to its female delivery partners during menstruation. Essential items like menstrual products and sanitary spray are included in their onboarding kits. Additionally, in seven major cities, Zomato has established rest points in collaboration with petrol pumps. These rest points offer clean sanitation, drinking water, charging stations, and first-aid facilities for delivery partners on the road.



## Application Process

- **Request Submission:** Employees can submit leave requests through the company's approved leave management system or via a written request to HR or reporting manager.
- **Notice:** Given the unpredictable nature of menstrual symptoms, employees are not required to provide advance notice.
- **Medical Certification:** Medical certification may be required for extended leave periods.
- **Team Communication:** Employees are encouraged to communicate their leave to their team, reschedule meetings as needed, and proactively address any potential impacts on deadlines.
- **Confidentiality:** The company will maintain employee confidentiality and data privacy regarding all health information.

## Pain Management

The company recognizes that some employees may require more than just time off to manage menstrual health challenges effectively. The company may consider offering certain support measures such as:

- Flexible work arrangements (e.g., remote work, adjusted schedules)
- Access to on-site amenities (e.g., quiet rooms, access to pain relievers)

## Legal Considerations

- **Compliance:** This policy will be reviewed and updated regularly to ensure compliance with all applicable laws and regulations, including Indian labor laws, industrial laws, and the Equal Remuneration Act of 1976.
- **Legal Counsel:** The company will consult with legal counsel to ensure the policy is legally sound and minimizes potential legal risks.
- **Tax Implication:**
  - **Paid Leave:** Paid menstrual leave is considered part of an employee's taxable income.
  - **Benefits in Kind:** Providing menstrual products or pain relief medication as a benefit is also considered taxable income.
  - **Unpaid Leave:** Paid menstrual leave is treated as taxable income, and any associated benefits will comply with tax laws.

## FIELD-BASED POSITIONS: EXTRA MEASURES TO CREATE A SAFE AND INCLUSIVE WORK ENVIRONMENT

- Provide portable emergency kits with pain relief and sanitary products.
- Collaborate with apps and local businesses for access to clean washrooms.
- Train managers to handle menstruation-related requests empathetically.
- Conduct confidential surveys to identify menstruation-related challenges.
- Allow flexible break timings for employees experiencing menstrual discomfort.
- Offer a list of local medical facilities and hotlines for emergencies.
- Establish peer support networks for sharing experiences and moral support.

### *Grievance Redressal Mechanisms*

- **Reporting Concerns:** Employees can report issues (e.g., leave denial) through the grievance system.
- **Dedicated Committee:** A dedicated HR committee will handle these grievances.
- **Resolution Timelines:** Grievances will be acknowledged within 2 days and resolved within 15 days.

### *Confidentiality and Data Privacy*

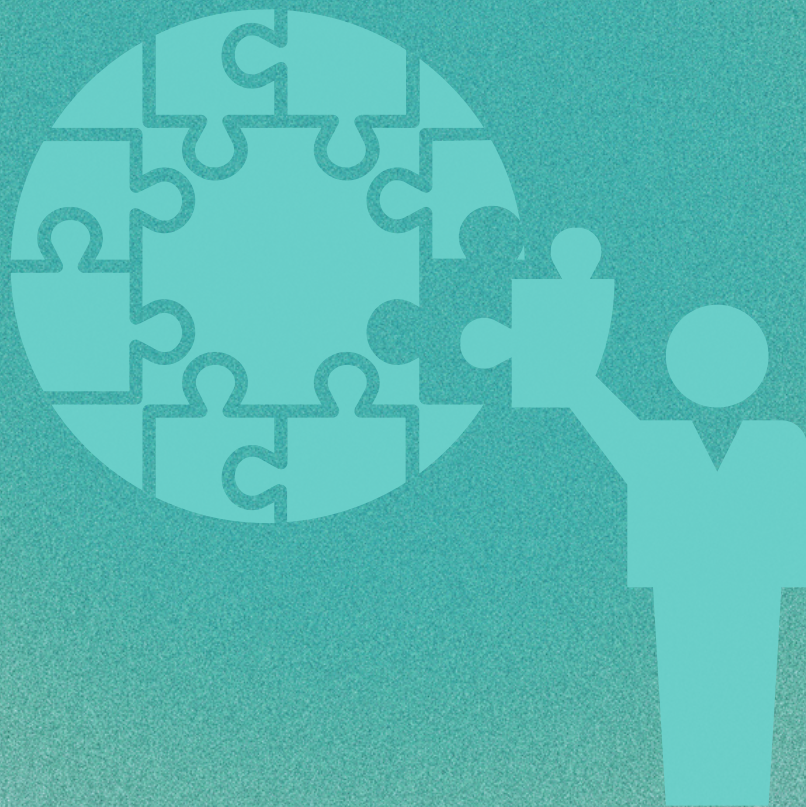
- **Data Protection:** Employee health data will be securely stored and accessed only by authorized personnel.
- **Anonymity:** Feedback for policy improvement will remain anonymous.
- **Compliance:** All practices will comply with relevant data protection laws, including the Indian Personal Data Protection Bill.

### *Misuse Prevention and Policy Integrity*

- **Fair Use Guidelines:** Menstrual leave should be used only for genuine health needs.
- **Monitoring:** HR will track leave usage trends to identify potential misuse while respecting privacy.
- **Penalties for Misuse:** Deliberate misuse will result in disciplinary actions, ensuring fairness.
- **Education and Awareness:** Ongoing employee education will promote responsible use of the policy.



# IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY





By following this detailed implementation strategy, the organization can confidently introduce a menstrual leave policy that balances employee well-being with operational efficiency, setting a benchmark for inclusivity and progressive workplace practices in India.

## Step 1: Needs Assessment

**Objective:** Identify gaps and challenges in menstrual health support within the workplace.

### Approach:

- Conduct anonymous surveys and focus groups to gather insights into employees' experiences and needs regarding menstrual health.
- Use structured indicators to monitor workplace menstrual experiences, including social environment, institutional policies, material access, and WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) infrastructure. Below is a [Global Waters Questionnaire](#) snippet to help structure your questionnaire.

Indicator	Details	Measure	Responses
<b>Social Environment</b>	Proportion of women who agreed that they hide the fact that they were menstruating at work	Where I work, women hide the fact that they are menstruating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strongly disagree</li> <li>• Disagree</li> <li>• Agree</li> <li>• Strongly agree</li> <li>• Don't know</li> </ul>
<b>Institutional Policies</b>	Proportion of women who reported being able to take a break to meet their menstrual needs whenever they needed to while working outside the home during their last menstrual period	If I am menstruating at work and need a break for menstrual needs, I am allowed to go.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not at all</li> <li>• Only during specific breaks or when I can get someone to cover my post</li> <li>• Only after asking permission or informing someone;</li> <li>• Whenever I need to</li> </ul>

## Step 2: Develop a Menstrual Leave Policy

**Objective:** Establish a fair menstrual leave policy.

### Action Steps:

- Form a cross-functional team with HR, legal, and DEI representatives.
- Conduct research on best practices and relevant legislation.
- Benchmark against progressive organizations like Zomato and Tata Steel.
- Draft a concise policy document covering:
  - Eligibility criteria
  - Leave duration and pay
  - Request and approval procedures
  - Flexible work options
  - Medical certification (if needed)
  - Grievance redressal
  - Confidentiality measures
  - Misuse prevention clauses.
- Ensure inclusivity for all individuals who menstruate.
- Consult legal experts

## POLICY LANGUAGE

- Highlight health, dignity, and equality as the policy's core principles.
- Encourage leadership, from the top management to line managers to talk about menstrual leave as part of the company leave framework regularly.
- Address concerns openly, such as male colleagues' support and the importance of trust in fostering collaboration.

Example:

“Menstrual leave is not a privilege but a health-focused initiative aimed at fostering inclusivity and equity. Employees are encouraged to use this provision responsibly and communicate proactively with their teams.”

## ZOMATO'S PERIOD SENSITIZATION INITIATIVES

Zomato focused on period sensitization initiatives to help reduce stigma and apprehension among women applying for leaves. This started with town halls to raise awareness. Realizing these weren't enough, they took it a step further by including activities in team offsites, like using simulation machines to help men understand menstrual cramps and hosting fun, interactive sessions with skits and quizzes.

### *Step 3: Upgrade Infrastructure*

**Objective:** Ensure supportive facilities for all employees.

**Action Steps:**

- Install clean, accessible restrooms with necessary supplies.
- Provide free or subsidized menstrual hygiene products in dispensers.
- Create comfortable, private rest areas for employee needs, including breastfeeding.
- Ensure all facilities are accessible for employees with disabilities.
- Include coverage for menstrual health conditions in health insurance.

### *Step 4: Communication and Training*

**Objective:** Build awareness and reduce stigma.

**Action Steps:**

- Use emails, posters, webinars, and meetings to educate employees.
- Organize workshops on menstrual health to dispel myths and promote respectful behavior.
- Train managers to support employees during menstrual leave sensitively.
- Incorporate the policy into employee handbooks and training for new hires.



- Utilize communication platforms to normalize menstrual leave and lessen stigma.
- Emphasize collaboration and inclusivity in recognizing diverse health needs.

## ***Step 5: Pilot and Full Implementation***

**Objective:** Test, refine, and scale the policy.

### **Action Steps:**

- Pilot the policy in a specific department or location.
- Monitor usage, gather employee feedback via surveys and focus groups, and assess impact on morale and productivity.
- Collect data on leave utilization rates and employee satisfaction.
- Analyze data to pinpoint improvement areas and address challenges.

## ***Step 6. Metrics and Evaluation***

**Objective:** Measure the policy's effectiveness and make data-driven improvements.

### **Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):**

- **Utilization Rates:** Percentage of employees using menstrual leave.
- **Employee Feedback:** Insights from periodic satisfaction surveys.
- **Productivity Metrics:** Changes in absenteeism, work quality, and output after policy implementation.
- **Health Metrics:** Reductions in health-related absenteeism and wellness scores.
- **Non-Penalized Leave:** Ensure that menstrual leave does not affect performance reviews; audit for bias.
- **Evaluation Frequency:** Quarterly evaluations in the first year, then semi-annual.

**Note:** This is a general framework, and the specific implementation should be tailored to the organization's size, industry, and needs.



# FROM CHALLENGES TO CHANGE





## Addressing Challenges

Challenges	Details	Possible Interventions
<b>Perception Challenges</b>	Concerns exist that menstrual leave may reinforce gender-based stereotypes, implying women are more vulnerable, which could bias hiring, promotions, or assignments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasize health and flexibility in communication.</li> <li>• Educate stakeholders on the policy's goal to reduce stereotypes.</li> </ul>
<b>Reduced Job Opportunities</b>	Employers may hesitate to hire women, fearing increased absenteeism. Biases in roles requiring consistent attendance may arise, creating a perception of women as less committed or capable.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effectively communicate menstrual leave purpose</li> <li>• Regularly evaluate hiring impacts and update policies.</li> <li>• Ensure equitable task distribution for career advancement.</li> </ul>
<b>Workload Redistribution</b>	Redistributing tasks for absent team members can lead to increased workload, resentment, stress, and potential team dynamic issues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transparent communication and rotational approaches for fairness.</li> <li>• Temporary resources or training to balance workloads.</li> <li>• Recognize the efforts of those covering tasks.</li> <li>• Use cross-training as a solution.</li> </ul>
<b>Administrative Challenges</b>	Managing and tracking menstrual leave is complex for smaller companies with limited HR resources and technology access.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish clear HR tracking and documentation protocols.</li> <li>• Utilize cost-effective HR software solutions.</li> <li>• Conduct periodic evaluations of policy implementation and impact.</li> </ul>
<b>Privacy and Sensitivity</b>	Concerns about maintaining employee privacy and creating a non-judgmental environment for leave requests.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Train HR staff on sensitive requests.</li> <li>• Promote an open, respectful environment.</li> <li>• Ensure confidentiality in leave applications.</li> </ul>
<b>Workplace Equity</b>	Fear of favoritism or disparities among employees.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure gender fairness in policy application.</li> <li>• Integrate menstrual leave into a balanced leave system.</li> <li>• Promote non-discrimination and fairness.</li> </ul>

Challenges	Details	Possible Interventions
<b>Education and Sensitization</b>	Lack of awareness about menstrual leave reinforces societal taboos and policy resistance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Host workshops and discussions.</li> <li>• Provide factual information on menstruation's impact.</li> <li>• Launch campaigns showcasing policy benefits for employee well-being.</li> </ul>
<b>Flexible Work Arrangements</b>	Concerns about whether flexible work options can supplement or replace menstrual leave without compromising employee needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide flexible work arrangements with menstrual leave.</li> <li>• Allow remote work or flexible hours during menstrual cycles.</li> <li>• Balance flexibility with specific leave policies for severe health issues.</li> </ul>

## Conclusion

Implementing a comprehensive and effective menstrual leave policy is a significant step towards creating a truly inclusive and supportive workplace for all employees. By prioritizing employee well-being, addressing potential challenges proactively, and continuously monitoring and refining the policy, organizations can reap numerous benefits, including reduced absenteeism, improved employee morale and job satisfaction, increased productivity through reduced presenteeism and enhanced employee focus, and a strengthened employer brand by attracting and retaining top talent through a demonstrated commitment to employee well-being and inclusivity. Ultimately, such a policy fosters a more respectful, supportive, and stigma-free work environment for all employees.


This guide provides a framework for organizations to navigate the process of developing and implementing a successful menstrual leave policy. It is important to remember that this is an ongoing process. Regular evaluation, feedback mechanisms, and continuous improvement are essential to ensure the policy remains relevant, effective, and aligned with the evolving needs of employees. By embracing this initiative and demonstrating a commitment to menstrual health and well-being, organizations can not only improve the lives of their employees but also enhance their overall business performance and contribute to a more equitable and inclusive society.



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